



OXFORDSHIRE
FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE



OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL

Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service Fire and Rescue Services National Framework for England Statement of Assurance 2023-2024



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Introduction

Welcome to Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service's Statement of Assurance for 2023-2024. As the Cabinet Member and Chief Fire Officer for Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS), we are pleased to present this statement of assurance for our local communities outlining how we meet the statutory duties of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004¹, Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005², Civil Contingencies Act 2004³, The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018⁴ and The Local Government and Housing Act 1989⁵

Cllr Dr Nathan Ley, Cabinet Member for Public Health, Inequalities and Community Safety

Rob MacDougall, Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety

What the Statement of Assurance (SOA) is

The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018 sets out the requirement for all fire and rescue authorities to provide annual assurance. It specifies that:

- Every fire and rescue authority must have regard to the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018 in carrying out their functions.
- Every authority must publish an annual statement of assurance of compliance with the Framework.
- The statement of assurance should outline the way in which the fire authority and its fire and rescue service has had regard – in the period covered by the

¹ [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#)

² [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#)

³ [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#)

⁴ [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018](#)

⁵ [Local Government and Housing Act 1989](#)



document – to the National Framework, their Community Risk Management Plan and any other strategic plan prepared by the authority for that period.

- The authority must also provide assurance to their community and to government on financial, governance and operational matters.

In 2022 we published our four-year Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP). Our CRMP is a strategic document that identifies potential risks within our community and outlines effective strategies to manage and mitigate these risks. It is a crucial tool for any fire and rescue service, as it allows us to proactively address the unique challenges faced by our communities in Oxfordshire.

Our CRMP is not a static document but a living plan that evolves with the changing needs and developments within our communities and the fire sector. To ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness, we produce an additional action plan each year. This annual plan takes into account the latest developments in Oxfordshire and the fire sector so we can integrate them into our overall strategy.

Our approach is proactive and focused on preventative activities. We believe that prevention is better than cure, and our strategies are designed to prevent incidents before they occur. This involves educating the public, conducting regular risk visits, and implementing effective risk management strategies.

Through our CRMP and annual action plans, we aim to create a safer and thriving Oxfordshire. We are committed to protecting our communities and ensuring their prosperity, and our CRMP is a testament to this commitment. By identifying and managing risks, we can ensure the safety and well-being of all residents in Oxfordshire.

In addition, the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018 states that the priorities for Fire and Rescue Authorities is to:

- Make appropriate provision for fire prevention and protection activities and response to fire and rescue related incidents;
- Identify and assess the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue related risks their areas face;
- Collaborate with emergency services and other local and national partners to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the service they provide;
- Be accountable to communities for the service they provide; and
- Develop and maintain a workforce that is professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse

Our Statement of Assurance will also assure that we have focused and met these priorities as required by the Framework.

As well as our SOA, the service also produces a separate Annual Report for 2023/24 detailing performance in all areas of service delivery across OCC Community Safety Services. You can read a copy of the Annual Report 2023/2024 [here](#).



Governance

Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority is the designated Fire and Rescue Authority for the County of Oxfordshire. It has a primary responsibility to protect the community, reduce harm and save lives through prevention, protection and response activities. The Chief Fire Officer and the Cabinet Member for Public Health, Inequalities and Community Safety ensure the Council meets its legal and operational responsibilities to provide an effective fire and rescue service for Oxfordshire's communities.

OFRS governance is carefully managed through regularly reviewed policies, procedures and assurance systems managed by monitoring Officers and Senior Leadership Officers. Effective systems of internal control are assured through a corporate governance framework. The Service adheres to the principles of the CIPFA / SOLACE framework "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government". Our Annual Governance statement demonstrates that we have fulfilled its obligations under this framework.

Further information can be found in our Annual Governance Statement, which is included in our Statement of Accounts publication [here](#).

Identify and Assess

Our overarching risk identification and assessment process for Oxfordshire has seen a review and change in approach over the last year in order to ensure we are identifying all foreseeable risk in our communities. Now known as our Oxfordshire Needs and Risk Analysis (ONRA), it serves the purpose of:

- Acting as our "risk assessment" of the County from a Fire and Rescue perspective
- Allowing us to look at the various hazards that are present in the County and assess the risks our communities and service face from these hazards
- Helping guide our plan as a service in everything that we do and how we respond through our Community Risk Management Plan. The plan is framed by our statutory duties under the legislation named in this Statement of Assurance

We follow nationally produced processes and guidance when producing our ONRA and CRMP, including the NFCC Community Risk Management Planning Strategic Framework and Fire Standard's Board Community Risk Management Planning Standard. By following these we are able to assess risk holistically and target our prevention, protection and response work through our CRMP. Some of the key highlights from our new ONRA process include:

- No longer looking at risks in isolation of "Prevention, Protection & Response" but looking at how they affect our communities and service across all departments, and in other areas such as People and Transformation



- Including an “Equality Impact Assessment from Risk” to ensure we are considering everybody in our community and are able to provide targeted mitigations and response.

Operational – Overview

The way in which we carry out our prevention, protection and response activities is based on our CRMP. This CRMP was published in 2022 and is our 4 year plan based on our ONRA process that identifies what risks exist in Oxfordshire that we are required to act upon through various statutory obligations, legislation, and regulations.

Our ONRA and CRMP are not static documents but a living process that evolve with the changing needs and developments within our communities and the fire sector. To ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness, we produce an additional action plan each year. This annual plan takes into account the latest developments in Oxfordshire and the fire sector so we can integrate them into our overall strategy.

Operational - Prevention Activity

Our prevention strategy is based around continuing to see a reduction in fires, road traffic collisions and other emergencies attended by OFRS through proactive, targeted prevention work across the county. This includes delivering educational programmes, providing advice and supporting visitors, residents and businesses to prevent incidents occurring. This year, our we have been carrying out the following activity in line with our prevention strategy in our CRMP:

Prevention Activity Area	What We Have Done
Cycling education and training for vulnerable and hard to reach groups in our community	Continuing to identify vulnerable and hard to reach groups which involved investigating and implemented targeted cycle training for teenagers and young adults as highlighted withing the Vision Zero Cycling group. Over the last year we have trained 6124 children through this scheme, a 26% increase from last year
Vision Zero Project	OCC Collaborative Vision Zero project group consisting of 6 working subgroups bringing together relevant groups, departments with a combined aim to reduce road injuries and collisions This includes Policy Development, Road Safety Education, Cycle Safety, Speed Management, New Infrastructure and Development, Improvement programs and Communications and Engagement.
Virtual Reality for training and engagement	Utilising and implementing technology and virtual reality media as a training and



	engagement tool for events, schools, Junior Citizens and across wider training and community safety activities.
Safe and Well	Upgrading the new Safe and Well app to v2.0 so that it is able to record risk reduction during visit, repeat visits, new equalities monitoring questions and is able to onboard national Home Fire Safety Checks. It will also allow streamlining of the Safe and Well booking process through providing an on-line option to book a visit.

Operational - Protection Activity

Our team remains committed to the comprehensive delivery of protection services throughout Oxfordshire, leveraging both technology and direct engagement to ensure adherence to the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Our efforts have been instrumental in maintaining compliance among commercial entities, with a focus on diminishing the risk of fire in non-residential buildings through a calculated, risk-based approach to business interaction and inspection. This year, we have refined our Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP) to further prioritise the inspection of high-risk commercial properties, enhancing our community service effectiveness.

In instances where individuals have neglected their legal duties, thereby endangering lives, we have not hesitated to initiate legal proceedings when it serves the public interest. This past year has seen us undertake prosecutions within our area of responsibility.

Fulfilling our role as a statutory consultee under Building Regulations, we have diligently ensured that new or modified buildings meet fire safety standards, with 694 formal fire safety and building regulation consultations conducted this year. In alignment with our protection strategy outlined in our CRMP, we have engaged in the following activities:

Protection Activity Area	What We Have Done
Engage with businesses to reduce risk through a combination of digital media, leafletting, physical visits and online seminars.	Develop an effective online presence via social media to educate and inform responsible persons of their legal fire safety requirements Collaborated with operational crews to deliver two themed business-safety initiatives to support the Protection Calendar themes.
Enhance our business engagement through an expansion of our PAS partnership working.	To further expand our Primary Authority Scheme (PAS) activities to influence



	business fire safety at a strategic level in organisations with high-risk premises.
Adopting the Competency Framework for Fire Safety Regulators (the framework) where relevant to the role by continuing with applications for Inspectors to be accredited by the IFE as well as inspectors working towards a Fire Engineering L6 qualification where appropriate.	2 of our team commenced their IFE accreditation with one person fully signed off, and we are aiming to put more staff through the process in the coming year. Additionally one of our staff have commenced their Fire Engineering L6 qualification.
To continue to increase the number of audits undertaken via our Risk Based Inspection Program and 'themed' activity to address high-risk premises-types.	We have carried out 449 audits this year, with 325 (72%) being recorded as satisfactory.

Operational - Response Activity

Throughout 2023-2024 we have been evaluating how we can adapt to changes in risk across Oxfordshire by beginning a comprehensive review of our response functions. The review process analysed the effectiveness, efficiency and resilience of the service whilst also look at ways of reducing our environmental impact. This resulted in recommendations for improvements across six areas of our response activity.

Five of these recommended changes are currently being implemented as they relate to specific, internal improvements. The final change – a new operational response model – is currently awaiting risk-modelling by an external provider. Once complete, public consultation will take place in relation to this new operational response model, which aims to improve response times and resilience of the service for the community of Oxfordshire.

In addition, this year our plan was to work on other specific areas within response which align with our ONRA and CRMP, such as reducing Unwanted Fire Signals, recruitment for Wholetime firefighters that focuses on diversifying the service's workforce, our collaboration with partners, to deliver aligned training on newly procured breathing apparatus and improvement of the operational availability of our fire appliances:

Response Activity Area	What We Have Done
Unwanted Fire Signals	Developing, implementing, and evaluating changes to Unwanted Fire Signals was ambitious in its scope for a single financial year, and therefore will continue this work into 2024-25. In 2023-24, the service successfully drove a Thames Valley



	aligned approach that resulted in aligned policy and procedure intentions and in a public consultation that ended in May 2024.
Wholetime Firefighter Recruitment	Our wholetime recruitment process began at the start of 2024 and resulting in recruiting 9 apprentice firefighters who are beginning their initial operational training at the Fire Service College in September 2024. These firefighters will be in our communities carrying out vital prevention, protection and response work by December 2024 whilst developing in their roles.
Thames Valley Breathing Apparatus Alignment	Throughout 2023-2024, the new Thames Valley breathing apparatus set has been introduced, with all three services now closely aligned in terms of breathing apparatus equipment, policies and practices. This has resulted in a reduction in the mobilisation of appliances into neighbouring counties to support BA operations, which saves money, reduces road risk, reduces environmental impact, and improves operational availability.
Joint Oxfordshire Resilience Team	The team responded to incidents, activated by the Resilience On Call Officer (ROCO) throughout 2023 and 2024 supporting our response to incidents and assisting our communities in recovering. The team also have statutory duties to help communities prepare for emergencies, assist with business continuity, and have processes to warn, inform and support the public in emergencies, with the team carrying this out across a large number of household, events and businesses.

Collaborative Arrangements

Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) which officially opened in 2015 and bought together the three control rooms from the fire and rescue services within Thames Valley, continues to handle and manage the mobilisation of resources to incidents in Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire areas, demonstrating the benefits and positive outcome of collaborative arrangements.

The Thames Valley collaboration board continues to explore further areas in which the three Thames Valley FRSs can work together to achieve positive outcomes for



its residents. This has included work such as the Thames Valley Breathing Apparatus Alignment as well as other areas such as production of joint policies and operating procedures so fire crews can work more closely together across the three counties. This has included work on implementing National Operational Guidance from the NFCC into all services' policies and procedures across the 3 counties to ensure standardisation and interoperability in our response work.

Memorandums of understanding (MOUs) for support exist with agencies such as Thames Valley Police, South Central Ambulance Service and the Defence Fire and Rescue Service, alongside MOUs with the voluntary sector including The British Red Cross and Oxfordshire Lowland Rescue. We have successfully worked alongside the broad spectrum of organisations throughout the year, including the wider Oxfordshire County Council, other blue light responders, partner agencies, utilities and services and the voluntary sector in order to provide a more holistic approach to our prevention, protection and response activities.

National Resilience

The National Resilience programme was established as part of the UK response to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001 and is a shared responsibility between central and local government. National Resilience provides specialist capabilities, personnel and resources which enhance the ability of the sector to respond effectively to large-scale or critical incidents. Those incidents may be natural disasters, industrial accidents or terrorist attacks.

OFRS is responsible for two national resilience functions for a large geographical area. These are:

- Detection, Identification and Monitoring - specialist teams that provide the Fire and Rescue Service with the ability to make an assessment on the potential presence of chemical, biological and radiological agents
- High Volume Pumping capability - Used to move significant volumes of water over long distances, either in response to floods, or to provide a water supply to fight fires in locations where large amounts are required.

Our staff train and exercises on national assets through the year to ensure their efficient and effective deployment and use of equipment when requested. Over the last year, we have deployed these national assets 5 times within Oxfordshire and 22 times nationally, demonstrating our dedication and commitment to protecting the wider population and our responsibilities as a National Resilience asset holder.

Terrorism

Chaired by OFRS's Deputy Chief Fire Officer, the Channel Panel is an early intervention scheme that supports people who are at risk of radicalisation and provides practical support tailored to individual needs. It can help people to make positive choices about their lives. It is about safeguarding individuals vulnerable to radicalisation by using existing multi-agency working between local authorities to identify individuals at risk of being drawn into terrorism, assess the nature and extent of that risk, develop the most appropriate support plan for the individual concerned,



with a clear process is in place to ensure that the right people are referred to the panel.

In addition, the findings and recommendations from the Manchester Arena Inquiry have been reviewed in detail and actioned by the service, and we are working on continuing to ensure that OFRS is able to respond to terrorist incidents through development of policy and procedures with the Thames Valley alignment group. We currently have a dedicated operational response team shared across the Thames Valley who are trained and equipped to respond to terrorism incidents, and we are currently rolling out training packages to the rest of our operational firefighters and officers to ensure they are able to safely and efficiently respond to terrorism incidents to support these teams and other Category 1 responders.

People and Wellbeing

As part of our people strategy, we have continued to work to ensure a positive culture as an organisation over the last year. In order to achieve this, we commissioned an independent cultural review by Stephanie Wheeler Associates across a range of topics. These ranged from exploring the implementation of our values within our daily work and understanding positive areas of our culture as well as exploring potential barriers that are in the way of our culture being as good as it could be and gaining a more detailed understanding of cultural leadership maturity levels within OFRS.

This process was a success and involved over 32 group discussions with over 190 people, 69 one to one conversations with our staff from across the organisation, and a total engagement of over 260 members of staff from 15 different locations and over 20 different Community Safety Services job roles, with staff tenure ranging from less than one month to over 35 years.

The findings of the report demonstrated good areas within the organisation such as the organisation having supportive colleagues, a great level of camaraderie, a nurturing environment and staff living the values of the organisation through day to day actions and behaviours rather than just “the words on the wall”. It also identified areas for improvement for us such as resource management, career development conversations and areas of improvement for senior leaders. The report also produced a detailed list of recommended actions and a roadmap of next steps, which we have begun to implement. We are currently working to deliver 8 key actions over the next three-months during this phase of the implementation.

This year we ran a whole time recruitment process for the first time since 2021 which resulted in 9 apprentice firefighters. We expect them to be on station and supporting our communities by the end of the year after completing their initial fire training. Additionally, we have continued to work on a number of projects and areas across our people strategy, including:

People Activity Area	What We Have Done
Continuing to work to increase the diversity of our operational	Supported a variety of positive action activities to attract a wide range of people and backgrounds into



workforce, through engagement with the community	the service. We have reviewed our recruitment materials as part of our On-Call Recruitment Campaigns. We continue to collect information on protected characteristics for recruitment and promotional processes so we can analyse where support and positive action could be considered.
Reviewing promotional processes and implementing feedback	We have reviewed past promotional processes and used feedback gathered to make further improvements to our promotion processes. Currently, we have updated plans for Crew Manager, Watch Manager and we have commenced a reviewing into Station Manager and Group manager processed following feedback from a Gateway trial in 2022 and the culture review findings.
Commitment to the NFCC Direct Entry Scheme	We have recruited a Direct Entry Station Manager into the service in line with our commitment to the NFCC Direct Entry Scheme. The primary aim of the scheme is to provide a different route to entry into the role of Station Manager, alongside the more traditional firefighter route, that can play a valuable part in diversifying senior management in fire and rescue services.
Continue to lead the contaminants group work for the service	We have established a contaminants working group to ensure that work is progressed to complete the action plan. Contaminants risk has gone through our risk process and this will be reviewed once the action plan is completed to understand if the assessment of action reduces the risk.
Continuing to train Mental Health First Aiders (MHFA) and evaluate their impact	We continue to support MHFAs across the service. We have continued training for new MHFA's. This gives staff access to another support system for wellbeing and mental health and is a positive interaction through peer to peer support.

National Fire Chief's Council (NFCC)

The NFCC is the professional voice of the UK fire and rescue service and aims to drive improvement and development throughout the UK Fire and Rescue Sector. OFRS has a proud history of engagement with the NFCC, and we are represented on a number of NFCC working groups covering a broad range of topics across the sector. Our Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety Rob MacDougal serves as Chair of the NFCC People Programme, which sees him leading a team that is defining the next People Strategy, providing a direction of travel for the sector over the next few years. OFRS have also worked with the NFCC over the last year on the Direct Entry Station Manager programme, and our Fire Protection team were nominated for two NFCC Prevention and Protection Awards over the last year, demonstrating the high quality work we do to protect our communities and our commitment to NFCC best practices and projects.



HMICFRS Inspection

In 2024, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspected OFRS, with their report published in July 2024. Their report highlighted several positive aspects as well as some areas for improvement. It highlighted that the service has:

- Improved the availability of risk information for control room staff
- Maintained a well-qualified protection team
- An effective prevention strategy that is focused on those most at risk
- Collaborated effectively with other organisations to enhance community safety
- Sound financial management, with strategic plans to improve efficiency and sustainability.

However, the inspection also identified several areas needing improvement. There are some delays in updating risk information on mobile data terminals, which hampers effective risk mitigation. The service struggles with the availability of on-call fire appliances (which is recognised as a nationwide issue) and has not met its response time targets in certain areas. Staff workloads, particularly in the prevention team and at middle management level are high, and there is a high number of temporary promotions and movements that can cause instability. The service could do more to enhance its approach to equality, diversity, and inclusion, and there is a need for clearer communication and better support for staff during the ongoing change programme.

Overall while OFRS has shown strengths in several areas, we also face challenges. Addressing these issues will be crucial for us to improve our effectiveness and efficiency whilst keeping the community safe. The ongoing improvements and development within the service, led by our Community Safety Services review, are key steps in the right direction, but we must ensure we continue this work in the most effective way with clear communication at our core.

Upon publication of the report, OFRS immediately began developing a robust action plan to address the areas identified as requiring improvement. We have made progress in some areas already, such as launching our updated Automatic Fire Alarm Response Policy, however some areas will require more time to refine and implement to ensure the best outcomes. We will continue to work with HMICFRS to ensure our actions provide the results needed to address the areas for improvement whilst also continuing to deliver and drive our positive work in the areas identified.

More detail on assessments of Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue service can be found on the [HMICFRS website](#).

Finance

Our budget for 2023-2024:



- The total net expenditure for Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service was £29.7m
- The cost of providing the fire and rescue service in 2023/24 was approximately 11p per day for each person within Oxfordshire and the cost per head of population was £39.62 per year.
- Our overall expenditure against the number of incidents we attend is £4625.99 per incident in 2023-24.

Financial data is taken from the CIPFA Fire and Rescue Statistics Auditors' findings. Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS) are an integral part of Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) who provide the statement of accounts, audit reports and pay policy statement.

A summary of auditors' reports and findings can be found in the annual audit letter for 2023-2024. The accounts and audit regulations require local authorities, including fire and rescue authorities, to prepare an annual governance statement in support of the annual statement of accounts. Full details can be found in the annual governance statement, which is included in our statement of accounts.

